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The Ethical, Social and Philosophical Foundations of the Relationship Between the State and Society in Western Philosophical Thought

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the issue of the relationship between the state and society in Western philosophical thought from a historical and philosophical perspective. It examines the views of ancient Greek thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, as well as the socio-political ideas of modern philosophers including Hobbes, Rousseau, and Voltaire. In addition, the essence of the state, its role in society, and the interrelationship between the individual, society, and the state are explored. Furthermore, theoretical approaches formed in different historical periods are comparatively analyzed, and their common and distinctive features are identified.

Keywords: Society; Justice; Enlightenment; Sovereignty; Stability; Wisdom; Philosophy; Knowledge; Doctrine; Social Life; Humanity; Social Stability.

1. Introduction

The issue of the relationship between the state and society in Western philosophical thought is considered one of the most pressing and complex problems. This issue has been at the center of attention of thinkers throughout different stages of human history, leading to theoretical inquiries aimed at understanding the nature of the state, its role and functions in society, as well as the balance between individual freedom and social order. Beginning with ancient Greek philosophy, the relationship between the state and society has been interpreted in ethical, political, and legal terms, and further developed in subsequent periods. Ancient thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle viewed the state as closely connected to the social nature of human beings and as an essential means of ensuring social stability and justice. Philosophers of the Modern and Enlightenment periods, in turn, reinterpreted these relationships based on the principles of the social contract, popular sovereignty, and the rule of law [1].

1.1. Subject of study

Subject of study directions including main structural components are the following:

1) The relationship between the state and society, as explained by the ancient Greek philosophers, the elucidation of these relations from ethical, political and legal perspectives as expounded by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the role of the principle of justice in social life, governance based on knowledge and wisdom and the interpretation of the state as the highest and most perfect social union of human life;
2) The humanistic vision of the Renaissance thinkers, who sought to create a just and humane society in accordance with the concept of a powerful unified state as well as the ideological role of humanistic ideas in the organization of relations between the state and society;
3) Thomas Hobbes's doctrine of social contract, the essence of the concept of the "state of nature", the social contradictions expressed by the concept of the "war of all against all", the rational substantiation of the

emergence of the state, the need for a centralized supreme authority in the process of ensuring social order, the principles of mutual agreement and legal regulation of the relations between the state and society;

4) The ideas of the general will and the social contract, and the process of moving from natural to civil freedom; Voltaire's doctrine of rational government based on ideas of reason, knowledge and justice; the doctrine of the state's service to the needs and interests of society; ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau on ensuring the balance of individual freedom and social order.

2. Literature

The issue of the state and society has been explored in the legacy of thinkers throughout history in Western philosophy. For the study of both ethical and legal bases of these relations, it is essential to study the ethical-political views of Socrates, the concept of the ideal state of Plato ("The Republic") and political teachings of Aristotle. Thomas Hobbes's writing, in the Modern period, provided a rational interpretation of the "state of nature" and the problems of social contract, in De Cive and Leviathan. The Enlightenment brought with it new ideas on how to balance between individual freedom and social order, through the theory of the social contract of Rousseau and the ideas on rational management of Voltaire. A comparative study of these sources will help to gain a deeper insight into this theoretical evolution.

3. Methodology

In this study, historical-comparative, analytical, and generalization methods were employed to examine the relationship between the state and society in Western philosophical thought. During the research process, the views of ancient Greek thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, as well as the socio-political ideas of later philosophers, particularly Hobbes, Rousseau, and Voltaire, were consistently analyzed. Through a systematic examination of sources, the evolution of the relationship between the state and society, along with its theoretical foundations and key principles, was identified.

4. Result and Discussion

One of the countries where philosophical thought developed in the ancient world was Greece. In ancient Greece, philosophy, as a reflection of social life, was closely connected with knowledge about nature and embodied a comprehensive worldview. The philosophical traditions founded by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in ancient Greece contributed to the development of an idealistic worldview.

Although Socrates emphasized that he did not engage directly in political activity, the relationship between the state and society occupies an important place in his philosophical views. While reflecting on human problems, particularly moral and spiritual qualities, he also deeply analyzed issues related to the structure of society, the governance of the polis, and the nature of the state. In this respect, the interconnection between the individual, society, and the state holds special significance in Socratic thought. In Socrates' philosophy, issues of politics and the state are closely linked to ethical categories. According to him, politics is above all an ethical activity, and the process of governing the state is directly connected with the moral development of the individual.

Socrates highlighted the decisive importance of knowledge in the governance of the state and society. In his view, to be a politician, leader, or statesman, a person must first possess the necessary knowledge and wisdom [2]. Just as

all virtuous activities are based on knowledge, just politics can be realized only through it. Governance grounded in knowledge, in turn, contributes to the formation of a just and ethical society. From this perspective, Socrates adopted a critical approach to traditional political systems in matters of state governance. He did not believe that the state should be governed merely by nobles, those elected by the majority, or individuals who come to power by chance. On the contrary, he argued that the right to govern the state should belong only to those who possess the knowledge and wisdom required for such responsibility.

The idea of the "knowledgeable ruler" put forward by Socrates reflects his political and philosophical ideal. Such a person, regardless of whether they govern within a system of democracy, oligarchy, or monarchy, is capable of ensuring justice and order in society [3]. Thus, in Socratic thought, the stability and harmony of the relationship between the state and society depend primarily on a system of governance led by knowledgeable and morally mature individuals.

Plato's socio-political doctrine is considered one of the key theoretical foundations for understanding the relationship between the state and society in Western philosophical thought. His views are based on the concept of an ideal state and a prosperous society, in which social stability and the strength of the state are explained through the principle of justice. According to Plato, justice consists in each individual performing their own role and engaging in the work that properly belongs to them. This idea is clearly expressed in his work The Republic, where it is emphasized that the proper functioning of each social class ensures overall harmony within society [4]. However, this approach does not imply separating the individual from society or absolutizing individualism. On the contrary, it is grounded in strengthening the interconnection between the individual and society and viewing them as a unified system.

Plato also regarded the categories of justice and law as intrinsically interconnected. He linked justice to natural law through the principle that "each person should have what is rightfully theirs", emphasized that the primary function of laws is to preserve this order. In doing so, the philosopher interpreted the state not merely as a political institution, but as a system grounded in the "world of ideas" and, in a certain sense, endowed with a divine foundation. This approach helps to more deeply illuminate the legal and moral foundations of the relationship between the state and society. In Plato's view, a just state is a system in which individuals are subordinate to the interests of the state and conscientiously perform their respective roles. Each class, rulers, warriors and producers, must fulfill its function; otherwise, social balance is disrupted, leading to injustice.

Plato's political and philosophical views are closely connected with his idealistic approach. He grounded state governance and adherence to laws, to a certain extent, in divine ideas, while also drawing on historical experience and traditional institutions in the pursuit of an ideal society. Thus, Plato's doctrine emerges as one of the key theoretical concepts in Western philosophy, offering a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between the state and society from ethical, legal, and political perspectives.

Aristotle's socio-political views represent an important stage in explaining the relationship between the state and society in Western philosophical thought. In his doctrine, the state is interpreted not merely as a structure that satisfies basic human needs, but as the highest and most complete form of social organization. According to

Aristotle, the state consists of citizens who unite in order to satisfy their needs, cooperate with one another, and achieve common goals. Initially, people enter into relationships to meet their material needs and serve one another through the division of labor. However, in Aristotle's view, the essence of the state is not limited to economic or legal functions. In addition to protecting individuals from injustice and establishing order, the state pursues a higher goal, ensuring a good and happy life for its citizens. Therefore, the primary function of the state is to create conditions for a prosperous and meaningful life for its citizens.

In Aristotle's doctrine, justice is regarded as the central category in the relationship between the state and society. He associates justice with the common good and interprets it as the primary aim of political life. Although justice is a relative concept, it must serve the common interest and be beneficial to all members of society. Therefore, the principles of equality and fairness emerge as important factors in ensuring the stability of the state and the well-being of society. According to Aristotle, true happiness can be achieved only within the sphere of political life, that is, in close connection with the state [5]. Thus, harmonious relations between the state and society contribute not only to material prosperity but also to the moral development of individuals and the attainment of the common good. In this way, Aristotle's doctrine substantiates the state as the highest form of human social life and provides a comprehensive explanation of its relationship with society.

The thinkers of the Renaissance, who widely promoted the ideas of humanism, regarded the realization of this ideal as depending not only on the establishment of a strong centralized state, but also on the creation of a just and humane society, which has long been one of humanity's enduring aspirations.

Thomas Hobbes's socio-political views represent an important stage in Western philosophical thought, as they explain the relationship between the state and society on the basis of a new social contract theory. His ideas on this subject are systematically presented in his works "De Cive" and "Leviathan", which were shaped under the influence of political instability and revolutionary developments in 17th-century England. Hobbes sought to interpret social phenomena through a scientific and philosophical approach, attempting to provide a rational justification for the origin and necessity of the state. In Hobbes's doctrine, the concept of the "state of nature" occupies a central place in explaining the relationship between the state and society. According to him, in the state of nature, individuals act in pursuit of their own interests, which gives rise to competition, fear, and mutual distrust. As a result, a condition of the "war of all against all" emerges. In such circumstances, neither security, nor stability, nor social progress is possible. Therefore, Hobbes argued that, in order to ensure social peace and stability, individuals are compelled to enter into a mutual agreement – a social contract. Through this contract, people voluntarily transfer part of their natural freedoms to a common authority. As a result, the state emerges as a supreme power that regulates society, ensures security, and resolves conflicts [6].

In Hobbes's view, the relationship between the state and society is established on the basis of compromise and coercive order. Peace and prosperity in society depend on individuals' adherence to mutual agreements and on the existence of a centralized authority that enforces them. Therefore, Hobbes considers a strong and centralized authority to be the primary condition for the stability of the state. In his opinion, social order and peace can be ensured only when power is concentrated in the hands of a single person or a particular group. Moreover, the concept of "public authority" occupies an important place in Hobbes's doctrine. According to him, citizens transfer

part of their rights to the state in exchange for general security and order. This, in turn, ensures the supremacy of the state and protects society from disorder and conflict.

One of the thinkers who advanced the issue of the relationship between the state and society to a new stage in Western philosophical thought is Jean-Jacques Rousseau. According to his views, this relationship can exist only on the basis of mutual agreement and the general will. In Rousseau's doctrine, primary emphasis is placed on the formation of a form of social unity in which, on the one hand, each individual's freedom is preserved, and on the other hand, the common good is protected. In his view, the essence of the social contract lies in the fact that, when individuals enter society, they do not completely renounce their natural freedom but instead transform it into a new form – civil freedom. As the thinker emphasizes, a truly legitimate political system is one in which each individual, upon becoming part of society, obeys only themselves and at the same time remains as free as before [7]. Thus, the social contract emerges as a fundamental mechanism for ensuring a balance between individual freedom and social order.

Voltaire's socio-political views associate many of the conflicts and disagreements in society primarily with the lack of scientifically grounded governance. Therefore, for effective governance, rulers must rely on reason, knowledge, and the principles of justice. In Voltaire's view, the balance between the state and society directly depends on rational and just governance. If rulers fail to recognize the shortcomings of their governing methods or do not strive to eliminate them, this leads to growing public dissatisfaction. Such discontent may ultimately result in revolutionary processes. Voltaire evaluates revolutions as the outcome of deep social contradictions and emphasizes that their consequences may vary either leading society into crisis or, conversely, opening the path to progress. From this perspective, he regards the state as an institution that serves the interests of society and operates in accordance with its needs and demands. He highly valued the responsibility of rulers, noting that their actions have a direct impact on social welfare and stability [8].

5. Conclusion and Future Suggestions

In conclusion, although the issue of the relationship between the state and society in Western philosophical thought has been interpreted through various approaches across different historical periods, the common element uniting them is the aspiration to ensure social stability and justice. While ancient Greek thinkers viewed the state as a means of achieving moral and social perfection, modern philosophers substantiated these relationships through the principles of the social contract and the rule of law. These views serve as an important theoretical foundation for understanding the role of the state in society, as well as its functions and limitations. At the same time, ensuring harmony between the state and society remains a relevant issue today.

5.1. Future suggestions

In the light of the above discussion the following directions are recommended for further studies on this topic:

1) A comparative study of the philosophical heritage of the West and the teachings of the Eastern thinkers, comparing the philosophies of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Rousseau and Voltaire with the views of representatives of Eastern philosophy, particularly those of the Muslim East, on the state and society to highlight and explain on a scientific basis the universal common values they share, as well as their national and regional characteristics;

2) Theoretical importance and practical value of classical social contract theories in the modern understanding of the rule-of-law state will be examined in detail, in order to gain a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the impact of ideas originating from Hobbes and Rousseaue on the formation of modern democratic institutions, civil society and the human rights field;

3) It explored the concept of the "knowledgeable ruler" as introduced by Socrates and Plato, along with other ideas of justice, in a way that was intertwined and inextricable from current debates relating to state governance, staffing, political values and ethics, and administrative culture;

4) To develop new theoretical approaches to the question of whether there is a balance between individual freedom and social order in the light of Rousseau's theories on the general will and civil freedom and Voltaire's notion of rational governance, and to create new theoretical and conceptual models of the relation between the individual and the state in the context of globalization, the information society and rapid technological changes.

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Consent for publication

The author contributed to the manuscript and consented to publication of this study.

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